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Stop aiming spyglass at the CIA

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I remember G. Gordon Liddy.

It's even okay with me that he parts his name on the side. Liddy, of course, was one of the Watergate rascals and served five years in the jug. But I've always admired his approach to Americans who sell their country's secrets to its enemies.

Liddy has urged that such traitors should be executed. He says that if he were given the authority he would get that job done "and feel no more qualms than I would swatting a fly."

Well now, I do not favor assassination — at least publicly — as a weapon of American foreign policy. But we keep catching traitors who are a danger to our national security, and I would see the day when a tough judge would give such insects a good slap and then send them off to the gallows or the electric chair.

These criminal jokers do their best to destroy America's ability — indeed, duty — to defend itself. Some day, if we don't watch out, one of them will steal all our nuclear

secrets and sell them to assorted fourth-rate governments so they can launch World War III. They give Benedict Arnold a good name.

Meanwhile, Congress continues to tussle with the chore of trying to curtail the activities of the Central Intelligence Agency. The goal seems to be the legalization of publishing certain information about what the CIA is doing, on the grounds that any agency that is too secret is a threat to the American public's right to know.

I can't quite figure out how this can safely be done. Well-meaning members of Congress echo the

argument of William Colby, a former CIA director and a man of great decency, who once said the CIA should pass on its information on what's going on in the world to "the entire American government," and at times even to the American people at large.

Colby has said in the past that the CIA "must do a better job of educating the public." Why? The agency's responsibility is to the President. If the President decides to reveal some CIA secrets, very well. But the CIA should not have any vested right to do so. No other government in the world permits its spy bosses to talk about their work. Britain's Official Secrets Act even forbids identifying the top bosses of its espionage establishment.

I still am more attracted to the viewpoint of another former CIA director, Richard Helms. Testifying at one of the many Congressional hearings on the activities of our spy shop, Helms declared bluntly that the

CIA "wasn't established to keep in touch with the public...its job is to advise the President and the National Security Council, stay out of the limelight and keep quiet."

Confound it. CIA critics should stop looking upon the agency as a sort of day care center for underprivileged bureaucrats. It is still a secret agency, which should bend every effort to keep potential enemies of the Republic from finding out what its spies have learned, and even how many paper clips its employees use on a given day.

There is a feeling in some governmental quarters that the CIA should be ushered into the last few years of the 20th Century as a national information service. Such advocates are fond of reciting the "abuses" committed by intelligence agencies world-wide over the centuries. Faugh! The old spy shops did some naughty things. But they didn't suffer blabbermouths. And they got the job done.